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CHAPTER VI

THE AGE-SET SYSTEM

I

ALL male Nuer are initiated from boyhood to manhood by a very severe operation (*gar*). Their brows are cut to the bone with a small knife, in six long cuts from ear to ear. The scars remain for life, and it is said that marks can be detected on the skulls of dead men. They are particularly clear in Plates XXVI(*b*), XXVII, and XXVIII. The ceremonial of initiation is more complex, and the age-set system has greater social importance among the Nuer than among other Sudan Nilotes.

We have described, and others have described, elsewhere the ritual of initiation. Though we have since collected further information on the details of the rites, we consider that to transcribe it here would be out of accord with the plan of this book. The barest facts are related. Boys are now usually initiated between the ages of 14 and 16; in the old days at a somewhat later age, perhaps from 16 to 18. Whether a boy is initiated in one year or in another year may depend on the milk and millet supply. A boy must obtain his father's consent to the operation, but it cannot well be refused, for the boy would then run away to the home of a kinsman and the father would be humiliated. He afterwards goes to a member of his father's age-set who performs a rite to give him the blessing of the set. A member of the clan likewise gives him its blessing, and his father and maternal uncle bless him. The boys make their own arrangements with the operator and each presents him with a fishing spear. The operator is any man who has learnt the art.

Several boys are initiated at the same time, for it is thought that were a boy to be initiated by himself he would be lonely and might die. Also, it is easier to cater for the boys and to give them the care and attention they require during convalescence if they are initiated in batches. Usually some four to a dozen boys pass through the rites together. Initiation can take place at any season, but it almost invariably takes place at the end of the rains, when there is plenty of food and the north wind blows and cicatrizes the wounds. Each village acts independently

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in arranging for its boys to be initiated. After the operation the boys live in partial seclusion and are subject to various taboos. This is a time of mild licence and they pass out of it by a special rite. On the day of the cutting, and on the day of the passing out of seclusion, sacrifices are made and there is festivity, which includes licentious horseplay and the singing of lewd songs. Only age-mates of the father of the initiate in whose homestead the feasting takes place attend it: others keep at a distance lest they see the nakedness of their kinswomen and mothers-in-law.

II

All boys initiated during a number of successive years belong to a single age-set (*ric*). There has, till recently, been a four-year interval between the end of one such set and the commencement of the next. These four years are known as the time 'when the knife is hung up', and at the end of that period it is said 'the knife is brought out' and boys may then be initiated again. A certain *wut ghok*, 'Man of the Cattle', is, in each tribe, responsible for opening and closing the initiation periods and thereby dividing the sets. He performs the appropriate rite in his district, and when the news goes round other districts begin or cease initiation. He derives prestige from his functions, but they are ritual and give him no political authority. Sometimes, in Western Nuerland, they are performed by a prophet, but it is possible that in these cases the prophet is also a Man of the Cattle. The age-sets are organized independently in each tribe, at any rate in the larger tribes, but it often happens that when a new set has been started in one tribe an adjacent tribe will follow its lead, so that the names and periods of sets in neighbouring tribes are frequently the same. Also, though in different parts of Nuerland the names of the sets are different and the open and closed periods do not coincide, it is easy for a man who moves from one part to another to perceive in which set he would have been initiated had he been brought up in that part of the country.

To-day there are no closed periods and boys are initiated every year. The Man of the Cattle announces every few years that he is about to cut the sets and performs a ceremony by which all

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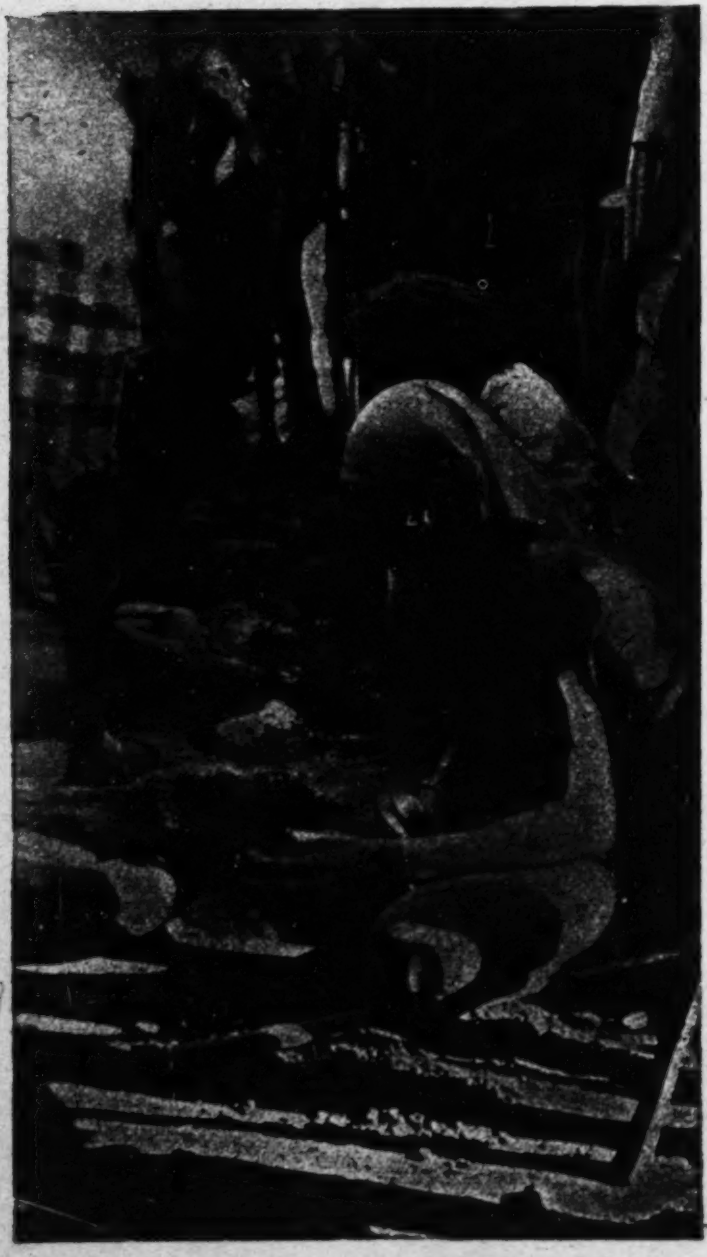

Initiation of boys (near Nasser, Eastern Gaajok)

[Face p. 250]

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youths initiated up to that year fall into one set and all youths initiated after that year fall into a junior set. The number of years during which a set runs before being cut is variable, and this has probably always been the case. We conclude on the evidence that ten years may be regarded as an average period between the commencement of one set and the commencement of the next. It was found that generally two sets, but occasionally one, intervened between the set of a man and that of his eldest son. In the case of younger sons two or three sets usually intervene. It may be accepted that on an average the generations of grandfather—father—son cover six sets.

At the time of my inquiry into the age-set system there were members of six sets alive, but there were only a few survivors of the senior set and the members of the next senior were very infirm. Sets with no living members are not recorded in the lists below. Their names are irrelevant to an understanding of the system and their order is so ill-remembered that the statements of two informants on the matter are seldom in entire agreement. It should be noted, however, that as far back as Nuer recitation carries us the names are not uniform for the whole of Nuerland and that they are not repeated. There is no cycle of names such as we find in many parts of East Africa. The Lou and the Eastern Jikany tend to have common names; also the tribes of western Nuerland; while the tribes of the Zeraf have some names in common with the Sobat river tribes and some with the tribes to the west of the Nile.

Lou tribe	Eastern Jikany	Lak tribe	Western Jikany and Leek tribes
Thut	*Thut*	*Thut*	*Lilnyang*
Boiloc	*Boiloc*	*Boiloc*	*Ruob*
Maker	*Maker*	*Ruob*	*Wangdel*
Dangunga	*Dangunga*	*Wangdel*	*Tangkwer*
Luac	*Carboc*	*Wooni*	*Rol*
Lithgac	*Lithgac*	*Kec*	*Juong*
Rialmac	*Rialmac*	*Pilual*	*Bildeang*

Each age-set has two or three subdivisions. Each year in the initiation period may receive a separate name and constitute a division though probably two years often have the same name and the divisions are usually two-year periods. But though a set is thus stratified internally and the divisions are called by different

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names, all members of the set are known by the name of the first division, and this common name persists while the others eventually fall into disuse. Thus to-day one seldom hears of *Maker indit* and *Ngwak*, but only of *Maker*, under which title both divisions are included. Likewise one hears small mention of *Gwong indit*, *Carboc*, and *Nyamnyam*, and reference is normally to *Dangunga* (*Gwong*), which term covers all three divisions. The senior division is called *indit*, the greater, and when the segmentary names are dropped the *indit* is dropped also, since its purpose is to distinguish the primary division from the later ones. Hence we have *Thut indit*, *Maker indit*, and *Boiloc indit*, the elder *Thut*, the elder *Maker*, and the elder *Boiloc*, but the *indit* ending in these names is eventually dropped and the complete sets become known as *Thut*, *Maker*, and *Boiloc*.

In recent years the matter has become somewhat complicated by the absence of well-defined closed and open initiation periods. Thus in my earlier visits to Lou and Eastern Gaajok I heard people speak of *Lieth indit*, *Lieth incar* (*Lieth intot*), *Caiyat* (*Pilual*), and *Rialmac* (*Rialdang*) as four divisions of the *Lithgac* age-set, but this was because there had been no declaration by the Man of the Cattle separating them into different age-sets. On a later expedition I found that the *Lieth indit*, the *Lieth incar*, and *Caiyat* had been declared to be a single age-set, and the *Rialmac* to start a new age-set, a second division of which, the *Kwehoryoamni*, has since been initiated. Similarly among the Western Jikany and Leek the *Bildeang* age-set has recently been declared separate from the *Juong*. At one time in Eastern Gaajok the *Lithgac* were cut off from the *Rialmac*, while in the adjacent country of the Eastern Gaajak they had not yet been separated and remained for the time being a single set. It may thus happen that, in modern times, a sub-division may for a time be regarded as the junior segment of one set and later become the senior segment of the next set. Below are given the sub-divisions of the age-sets in the Lou and Western Jikany tribes:

Lou		Western Jikany	
Thut	*Thut indit* *Muothjaang* *Lilcoa*	*Lilnyang*	*Lilnyang* *Lilcoa* *Lilcuath*
Boiloc	*Boiloc indit* *Golyangkakeat* *Laibwau*	*Ruob*	*Ruob* *Nomalith*
Maker	*Maker indit* *Ngwak*	*Wangdel*	*Wangdel* *Wathcar*

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MARRIAGE

Girls witness serious love-making and courtship earlier than boys. At dances small girls follow their more experienced sisters and cousins, imitating their movements during the dancing and afterwards sitting with them while the young men pay them compliments and try to persuade them to retire with them into the long grass. When a girl is about twelve or thirteen initiated boys begin to court her, and when she is about fifteen or sixteen she has at least one lover and probably one in each of the villages neighbouring her own. She passes through a succession of love affairs, besides more casual affairs. I doubt whether any girl in Nuerland goes to her husband a virgin.

As a rule boys are initiated from about fourteen to sixteen. Unlike the girls, whose social life develops slowly from childhood to marriage without any sudden change of status, the boys jump at initiation from the grade of boyhood to the grade of manhood, and the character of their social life is correspondingly transformed; though even before initiation boys make some adjustments in their way of life in anticipation of the status they will acquire when they have passed through the rites. In particular, they abstain from eating in the presence of unrelated girls. A small boy eats with his mother and sisters, but when he is about six he eats with the other boys of the household when the womenfolk have guests, lest they might feel embarrassed at the presence of a lad, though only a small one, and, bit by bit, he gets into the habit of eating with them regularly.

After initiation a lad takes on the full privileges and obligations of manhood in work, play, and war. Above all, he gives himself whole-heartedly to winning the favours of the maidens of his neighbourhood. Courtship now rivals devotion to cattle as his major interest. In speaking of a recently initiated lad Nuer often say: 'And now he has become a man and will court the girls.' He takes every opportunity for flirtation which offers itself. His chances are chiefly at dances, and Nuer youths, for this reason, attend as many wedding dances and other drum-dances as they can in their district during the rains and the harp-dances at neighbouring camps in the dry season. In speaking of these dances young men speak always of the girls they will meet at them, of how the girls will admire their finery and their excellent dancing and display of spearmanship and duelling with the club, and they add: 'And then of course we will spend the night in courting.'

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to the peculiar position in each elementary family of the eldest child.* The eldest child of either sex is known as *gat ma keagh* and the mother may address him (or her) as *keaghda*, my first-born. This child must never use the spoon of his father or mother, and I have sometimes been given to understand that this is one of the reasons for the bringing up of an eldest child by his maternal grandparents, it being felt better to keep him away from his parents' home till he is of an age to observe the prohibition. He must also avoid sleeping or sitting on his mother's sleeping-hide, for this may make her barren and may also injure the father, the child himself, and the cattle. I believe also that if the eldest child is a girl she may not use the horns of female animals for any purpose. When an eldest male child is initiated an extra incision is made, at any rate in some parts of Nuerland, on his forehead—seven instead of the usual six—and an ox must be sacrificed at the ceremony, whereas a goat or sheep may be considered sufficient for a younger son. Parents, especially the mother, and maternal uncles are said to fear the curse of an eldest child.

These customs relating to the eldest child are an indication of his special position in the family and kinship system. He is born in his mother's home and ought to be brought up there if his maternal grandmother is alive. If she is dead the child will probably be brought up by his parents till he is about six years of age, and then go to his maternal uncle till puberty. The eldest child is the keystone of the marriage. Till he is born the marriage is not regarded as complete. He is also the link through which the kin of the father and the kin of the mother are brought into relations of kinship with one another, for the child is the child of the mother's people as well as the child of the father's people. It is true that he belongs to his father's lineage, because he is the child of their cattle, but the sentimental claim of his mother's people to their daughter's child is recognized in their right to bring the child up in their home.

Indeed it must be acknowledged that in Nuer family life there is always a pull on the children in both directions: a pull of legal and religious norms and of the whole pattern of the politico-social

* The youngest child, the *pek*, also has a special position in the family, an indication of which in a male child is in some tribes the cutting of an extra line on his forehead at initiation, as in the case of an eldest male child. I am not certain, however, how socially significant is his position.

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individual as he passes from infancy to old-age. Thus each person passes successively into one grade after another, and, if he live long enough, through the whole series—infant, boy, youth, young married man, elder, or whatever it may be..... In East Africa, where the age-organisation is highly elaborated, each age-set normally passes from one grade to another as a whole."[1]

In this paper we are dealing mainly with the change of status brought about by initiation from Boyhood to Manhood. Initiation involves, however, not only a change from one social grade to another but also entrance into a set in which the individual remains for the rest of his life. The members of each set have a common name, like status, and like patterns of behaviour towards one another and towards members of senior and junior age-sets.

Among the Nilotes of the Sudan the age-set system appears to be most important among the Nuer on account of both the severity of its initiation and the social significance of the privileges associated with it. Among the Shilluk age-sets do not seem to occupy an important place in social organisation and the institution has an appearance of decay. The Seligmans record that at the time of their visit "it was of little importance and was probably dying out."[2] Among the Dinka it gives the impression of being of more importance than among the Shilluk and of less importance than among the Nuer, and the same may be said of the age-sets of the Nilo-Hamitic Bari discovered by Mr. Whitehead.[3]

The chief officer in respect to initiation into age-sets is the *wud ok* and this is in keeping with the fact that initiation largely concerns a boy's contact with the cattle. Before initiation he milks the cows and looks after the small calves and sheep and goats. After initiation he is strictly prohibited from milking the cows and he acts as herdsman to the adult cattle. During the period of initiation it is taboo for him to have any contact with the cattle and his first action on its conclusion is to re-establish this contact. After initiation also he receives a bullock or two from his father, and becomes legitimate owner of a bullock name and is permitted to dance and sing behind the bullocks.

[1] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. *Man.* 13. 1929.

[2] C. G. and B. Z. Seligman. "The Pagan Tribes of the Southern Sudan," pp. 72-3.

[3] *Id.* pp. 170-2 and 263-4. Cf. the lengthy account of age-sets among the Nilotic Lango of Uganda by J. H. Driberg.

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From the point of view of initiation Nuer life is divided into two periods, the initiatory period and the period when no initiation may take place. These alternating periods are known as that when the knife is brought out, *ngom kam rar*, at the commencement of the period of initiation, and that when the knife is hung up, *ba ngom ngaʃ*, at the conclusion of the period. At the commencement of an initiation period the cattle-expert kills a bullock, a big dance is held, and he makes a speech opening a new period of initiation. It seems that in each tribe there is one cattle expert whose authority is recognised in matters concerning the age-set cycle.

In Gaajak country there was a serious dispute between two cattle-experts about commencing a new age-set. The privilege of giving orders for initiation had previously been in the hands of the lineage of Ngweny Riek. Owing to the fact that there was no son old enough to perform the duty it was carried out by the lineage of Jop Gai. Afterwards these two lineages appear to have taken over the duty in turn; the lineage of Riek gave orders for the *Thut* age-set to be initiated, the lineage of Gai gave orders for the *Boiloc* age-set to be initiated and so on. When it came to the *Rialmac* age-set it was Ngweny's turn to order initiation to commence but Jop refused to allow him to officiate. In revenge Ngweny made indentations into the ceremonial knife to render it useless and uttered a curse, saying that if the knife was his right then pus would come out of the ears of Jop, whereas if the knife belonged to Jop then pus would come out of his own ears. Another informant said that the dispute was occasioned by the question whether the knife should be brought out or hung up, *i.e.*, whether the period of initiation should be opened or closed and that Ngweny said," Let the knife now be hung up and not be taken down again till one of us has died. When one of us has died let the other order initiation to commence." Jop died and his rival initiated the *Rialmac* age-set. This same informant said that the knife will in future remain in the hands of the lineage of Ngweny since, as a result of Jop's death from the curse, his lineage would not again shoulder the responsibility.

It is the cattle-expert who gives a name to each age-set, *e.g.*, *Dangunga*, *Maker*, *Lithgac*, etc., at the end of a period of initiation and no one may then be initiated until he has opened a new period. It is believed that if a boy were to be initiated after the cattle-expert had given orders for

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the period to be closed his head would swell and he would die. It is possible however, if a boy is much older than the age at which Nuer generally have incisions made on their foreheads and if his family greatly desire him to be initiated, for the ceremony to take place in a neighbouring tribe where the period of initiation is still open, since not every tribe has its open and closed periods at the same time and there is often overlapping in this respect between different tribes. Thus I was told that Lou boys who insisted upon being cut at a time when the Lou were in a closed period might cross over into the adjoining Ngok Dinka country and be initiated there if it were still in an open period.

When the *wut ok* wishes to close an initiation period he takes a bullock and rubs ashes on its back and makes a speech formally closing the age-set and starting a closed period in which no boys in the tribe may be initiated. The tip of his ceremonial knife is then placed in the fire and afterwards stowed away in a pot. The bullock, after its legs have been cut off, is divided longitudinally into halves. I believe that one half is taken by members of the set which has just been closed and the other half by the set immediately senior to them. They then eat the flesh together. However, I am not sure about this point.

Though I have spoken throughout of the *wut ok* or cattle-expert as the authority who decides upon opening and closing age-sets we are not all agreed upon this point. My own information is derived from two or three informants but it is supported by statements of Stigand and Crazzolara.[1] Jackson, on the other hand, says that as a rule the oldest surviving member of the senior existing age-set gives the order for the ceremony to be held and that it is he who initiates the first boy who should be his own son or a near relative. He adds that this man must be a leopard-skin chief and that after he has initiated the first boy the cattle-experts in each division of the Nuer are responsible for sectional arrangements.[2] Mr. Coriat also writes: "The classes are not regulated by a cattle-expert; the *wud ok* or Man of the Cattle is responsible only for the initiation ceremony itself. Age classes are now regulated and named by certain 'kwar mon,' Land Chiefs, with traditional powers."[3]

[1] Major C. H. Stigand, "Warrior Classes of the Nuers," *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol. I, 1918, p. 116. Pater Crazzolara, "Die Gar Zeremonie bei den Nuer," *Africa*, Vol. V, 1932, p. 28.

[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 145.

[3] Privately circulated memorandum.

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Boys are usually initiated between the ages of 14 and 16 but sometimes they are younger than 14 and sometimes they are older than 16. Sometimes a boy will just miss being initiated during an initiation period and he will then have to wait till the next age-set opens, by which time he may be somewhat older than is usual at initiation. On the other hand in order to avoid this happening a boy will sometimes be initiated at an unduly young age. Consequently one often sees tall youths without the marks of manhood on their foreheads and at the same time quite small boys with these marks. Another factor determining the age at which a boy will be initiated is the wealth of his family since they are not always able to supply their son and his comrades with corn and milk during their convalescence. If a family is as poor as this their son will either have to wait till the following year when his family will be better off or he will rely on the generosity of his relatives. His relations will generally assist him in the circumstances and it is frequently his maternal uncle who undertakes the expenses of initiation on behalf of his sister's son. Also a boy will not hesitate to appeal to his father's brothers for support and they would certainly not refuse him their assistance. Nothing is more humiliating for a boy than to see his playmates "become men" while he remains a "boy" compelled to work side by side with the womenfolk of his household and cattle-camp.

When his father has agreed to his initiation the boy goes to a member of his father's age-set and this man will pluck out a tuft of the boy's hair from the centre of his head (*nhiaw dêr*) and will spit on it and afterwards rub the boy's face and head with it (*be yinyo poinde*). It appears that it is necessary for the father's age-set to give their blessing to his son through their representative. Also the boy's own father will rub his son's head with ashes, and both of these men will address the boy saying: "May there not be the slightest difficulty in the initiation."

Several boys are usually initiated at the same time, being either members or relatives of the same village. It is thought a bad thing for a boy to be initiated by himself as he will be lonely and will ail if he is cut off from his playmates and fellow-members of his age-set. He will pine for them (*be riele tim*). In the part of Nuer country which I know arrangements are made for about four to a dozen boys to come together and be initiated at the same time and to spend their convalescence together. It does not matter when they are initiated so long as it is during an open

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period (which lasts several years) and at the right time of the year. The right time is in the *jiom* (our winter) when there is plenty of food after the harvest and the north wind, which cicatrizes the wounds, is blowing. But a boy may be initiated also in what corresponds to our springtime. I have no knowledge of initiation being restricted to a few days during which hundreds of boys are initiated, as Jackson gives one to suppose: "Some two hundred boys can be initiated in a day, each boy having the operation begun and completed on the same day. The doctors move from village to village where the boys are collected."[1]

The boy himself makes arrangements with the operator to cut his marks of manhood. There are a large number of these operators and there seems no reason why anyone should not practise if he has the necessary skill. The boy takes a fishing spear to the operator and presents it to him. With this is dug the hole into which the blood will flow and it afterwards becomes the property of the operator.

The operation takes place in the early morning before the sun is high, and the head is prepared on the previous day. It is closely shaved at midday since it is not considered well to shave the head in the morning. Just before the cutting the forehead is well washed with water and is rubbed with pancreas (*kōl*) (*ba nhiamde cuth ka kōl*) and finally with dust (*tup*). A hole (*koahriem*) is dug to receive the blood and in this the head rests on a grass circle (*thac*). After the operation is completed this hole is filled in with earth as it is thought a bad thing for the blood to remain exposed lest a dog or other animal might eat it. The cutting takes place in front of a hut or byre, and I was told that it would be highly improper for it to take place outside the homestead, for the boys' blood should be spilt in the homestead itself. Mothers and fathers and relatives and friends, even girl friends, watch the boys undergoing their ordeal. Tradition lays it down that a boy must show no signs of fear before or during the operation but often the ordeal is so terrible that their nerves give way. It is said that some boys will defæcate with fear and pain, and some have been known to struggle and even to run away, though when this happens they are held down with force and their relatives are occasioned great shame. It is common for boys to faint during the operation and then their heads are slightly raised and milk is poured down their throats to revive them. Nevertheless as a rule boys display admirable

[1] *Op cit*, p. 145.

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courage and betray neither fear nor pain, fortitude assisted by the presence of relatives whom they do not wish to disgrace and girls whose favours they hope to win.

The first cut is the most painful, probably because it severs the supra-orbital nerves. It is known as the *wec dɔhl* (the wiping out of boyhood) and runs just above the eyebrows right across the temples. The second cut is made just above the first and is called *gwec man dwiel* because before initiation if a boy were hungry he would go to the entrance of his mother's hut and ask for food, whereas after initiation, when he has become a man, he will not plead for food but will sit quietly and bear the pangs of hunger. Altogether six cuts are made from the centre of the forehead to level with the right ear and the operator then completes them by commencing from the incisions at the centre of the forehead and cutting to level with the left ear. There are thus six parallel cuts running right across the temple from ear to ear.

The best description of the operation is given by Miss Huffman who has witnessed it and whose account I give here rather than my own which is based on oral accounts. "A hole from four to six inches in diameter and about six or eight inches deep is dug for each boy. The earth which is taken out of the hole is pulverized and spread around the hole in order that it may absorb the blood. Women and girls attired in their dance skirts rush in, singing and dancing. One boy is called. He comes out, stark naked, not even wearing a bead. He lies down on his back with his head in the hole. He folds his arms over his chest and then he is ready. The man, kneeling beside him, begins to cut. He starts at the centre of the forehead and extends the cut to or even past the ear. The first cut is made just above the eyes, then the remaining cuts are made parallel to it until they are six in number. Then the man goes over to the left side and, kneeling there, repeats the same process. Then he returns to the right side and makes sure that all the cuts are deep and continuous at the centre of the forehead and that they are six in number..... As one is finished another boy is called until all lie there, still and bleeding. Usually everything is very quiet when the actual cutting is going on, the only sound heard being the grating of the knife on the bone. The boy lies there until the bleeding has stopped, then he is helped into the house. He crawls into the house on his hands and feet, but with his back next to the ground and tries to hold his head and body in a horizontal position....."[1]

[1] Ray Huffman, "Nuer Customs and Folk-lore," 1931, pp. 30–31.

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As soon as the cutting is finished the boys go and sit in front of the hut before which the operation has taken place. If they are able to do so they walk unaided with their heads held back from the shoulder. Otherwise they are assisted. Seated with their backs to the hut and with their heads held back they wave away flies from their lacerated foreheads. Meanwhile their mothers and the other women present utter ceremonial cries of joy as they dance in front of them (*he yi wa kuk*).

The lines cut are six in number but occasionally one meets men with seven cuts. Father Crazzolara says that this is due to the fact that the operator "in his artistic elation, forgets to count, and adds one or two lines beyond the number demanded by the fashion that prevails at the time."[1] This does not seem to me a very likely explanation. In Lou country I was invariable told that when two brothers were initiated at the same time the youngest received seven cuts, a statement borne out by the several cases I was able to investigate. A youth from Lek country on the Bahr-el-Ghazal who had seven cuts on his forehead told me that it was the custom in his tribe for the eldest son in a family to receive an extra cut but I was unable to check his statement from other informants. Miss Huffman writes that sometimes the operator "happens to be a very dear friend of the boy and may honour him by cutting seven cuts instead of the customary six."[2]

I do not think that there is any need to emphasize the severity of the ordeal, which may readily be understood from Father Crazzolara's statement that the cuts are distinctly visible on the skulls of dead Nuer. It is surprising therefore that it does not often result in death. Yet I have never heard of a boy dying during or after the operation though I made enquiries on the point, and the staff of the American Mission at Nasser told me that in their long experience of the country they had never heard of a fatal operation. Father Crazzolara on the other hand states that death is not infrequent.[3]

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On the day on which a boy is initiated from four to ten pots of beer

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 32. "Es soll vorkommen, dass der Garmeister manchmal in Eifer für seine Kunst, das Zählen vergisst, und eine oder zwei Linien mehr anbringt als das Gesetz verlangt. Darumen wird vielfach ein Beinträger aufgestellt, der darauf zu achten hat, dass der Patient nicht mehr als sechs gespaltet werde."

[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 32.

[3] "Die ersten 24 bis 28 Stunden sind die kritischen, wegen der Gefahr des Verblutens. Es ist keine Seltenheit, dass ein alter Mann, der nachts oder in aller Frühe nachsehen kommt, einem der Knaben unbedeutlich, ja in der Todesstarre antrifft." *Id.*, p. 32.

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are brewed and a bullock or sheep is killed. It seems that they do not always kill an animal but they must do so when it is an eldest son who is being initiated or a boy whose eldest brother has died. Members of the father's age-set eat the meat at night and they alone. During the night they sing songs amid the cattle. On the following day, in the afternoon, they drink beer and leap about behind the bullocks and there is a lot of horseplay. The womenfolk seize the penises of members of their husbands' age-set, the father of an initiated boy especially being subject to this treatment. They tie cord to the penises of the men and pull them while the men retaliate by tugging at the skin aprons of the wives of their age-mates. A man of the age-set of the father of an initiate will lift up the apron of his wife (the boy's mother) and will utter a ceremonial cry into her vagina. This man is generally the woman's *cucanda*, that is to say a paternal cousin of her husband. Only members of the father's age-set and their wives will partake in this horseplay in the homestead of the father of the initiate. Thus if the boy is the son of a *maker* all members of the *maker* age-set will take part in the festivities, together with their wives, while members of the other age-sets, *e.g.*, the *Dangwaga*, will have their own fun in a neighbouring homestead with their wives. Younger people will not go near these festivities of their elders because they might see the genitals of their mothers and aunts. All those who have married daughters of the men who are sporting themselves will also give the festivities a wide berth lest they should see the nakedness of their mothers-in-law. This dance is called *bul ruathni* or *bul ruath dhoi*. They say that they make this horseplay because they are glad that their child has become a man.

After the cutting, which is called *gar*, the boys are shut up in a hut. This is not built for the purpose but is temporarily vacated by the women of the family in whose homestead the operation has taken place.

Between the cutting and the ceremonial exit from the period of convalescence the boys are known as *ok*. The boys suffer excruciating pain during the first two days or so after the operation and nothing can be done to relieve their agony. These first few days are recognized as being a time of great danger for the boys since the wounds may break open again and great loss of blood ensue. Youths and girls are prohibited from visiting the boys during this period since they are likely to be sexually unclean. Especially are pregnant women kept away from the vicinity

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and only those women who are nursing babies or who have reached the menopause are allowed near their hut. One or two men, often a youth who was initiated the year before, and who abstain from sexual relations for the time, will keep guard over the boys to prevent their heads from falling sideways, so that the grass circle which they use as a pillow sticks to their temples and in the effort to get it loose the wounds are re-opened. They must sleep on their backs with the backs of their heads on the grass pillows. An old woman may also sleep in the hut and assist in looking after the boys. Should the wounds break open and bleeding be renewed the place is cauterised with a *rip* which has been heated in the fire.

Until they are taken to the river and cleansed at the end of their seclusion the boys must strictly avoid any contact with the cattle. This is a ritual prohibition, a *bëit*, which involves a curse if it is infringed. Not only are they prohibited from going among the cattle but they must even avoid treading on cattle dung. It is said that if a cow approaches them the boys must immediately run away into the shelter of their hut. It is believed that a breach of this prohibition would prevent the formation of regular scars (*ghiar*) on the forehead so that all the marks of initiation, the pride of manhood, would be obliterated with the exception of the *mar dokl*, the cut just above the eyebrows. In this connection Miss Huffman records of an initiate that, " When one asks him if his wounds are healed he will always say ' not yet,' but one may find out if they are really healed by asking him if he has gone among the cattle. If not, the wounds are still sore, but if he has been with the cattle it means that the wounds are well healed although the boy will not say so for fear someone with the evil eye should hear of it."[1]

During their convalescence the boys are given food in liberal quantities and are probably better fed than at any other time in their lives. Considering that the Nuer is always hungry and frequently starving this abundance of food makes an impression that it is hard for us to appreciate fully. When speaking of their experiences at this period one finds that the festal nature of their convalescence is frequently stressed. They say that if any youth who has not been freshly initiated looks longingly at their food the initiates will belabour him while if it were an older man they would not strike him but neither would they invite him to partake of the meal. The boys share and share alike, as befits comrades, in any food

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

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that is brought to them. One mother will cook for them in the morning and another in the afternoon and they will take it in turns to provide their sons with food, but what each brings is shared by all and not eaten by her son alone. The mothers themselves bring the food to the hut in which the boys are confined unless they have *thar*, are ritually unclean. If one mother has much milk from the cows of her homestead she will bring it to the boys, while if another cannot procure milk she will make up for her poverty in this respect by supplying plenty of corn for their meals. During the period of their seclusion the boys are restricted to soft food that can be easily swallowed, such as milk and flour paste, but a soft corn mash and even soft and finely chopped meat (*mig ma kochoc*) is allowed them in Lou and Jekany countries. These eatables do not require mastication, a muscular exertion that might cause the veins to break again. Father Crazzolara writes of the West Bank Nuer that the boys are confined for two months and that for the first fortnight no food other than milk and milk mixed with flour is allowed to them.[1] I do not think that this is the case among the Lou and Jekany tribes where the boys eat porridge and soft meat at the commencement of their seclusion and where the period of confinement to their hut does not last for more than a week to a fortnight. During this time they may not wash their faces. After about a week they are allowed to sit up but must remain quietly in a single sitting position. After a few more days they are considered to be healed even though their wounds have not yet closed. Not all the boys heal at the same time: some are healed at the end of a fortnight while others only after a couple of months. When they are allowed to come out of their hut they sit by the door in the evenings and annoint their foreheads with oil and sleep with them oiled. They wake before dawn and wash their foreheads with warm water and then one of the men who is looking after them cleans out clotted blood from the cuts. They then sit and shiver in front of their hut while the cold north wind blows into the wounds and causes them to cicatrise.

Apparently it is between the time when they are well enough to leave the hut and the day on which they are ritually cleansed by bathing in a river that they are considered to enter into a period of mildly prescribed licence. They still avoid contact with the cattle and spend their time wandering about in bands in neighbouring gardens and bush. In Lak country at this time they wear a special cord, called *kareth*, around their

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 32. "Mit der Milch wird allmählich etwas Mehl vermischt und so einen dünnen Brei gekocht; dieser Brei und Milch sind für ein paar Wochen ihres einzige Kost. Etwas Fleischbrühe und allenfalls ganz fein gehackten Fleisch kann später dazu kommen."

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881 786 necks but this is not the custom in Lou country. On both sides of the Nile, however, they carry a special stick, called *rie*. In Lou country the boys wear a special necklace of *kaac* beads. During this period the boys are allowed to behave in a manner that would not be tolerated at ordinary times. If they meet uninitiated boys in the gardens they set upon them and flog them with their neck cords or sticks and tear their flesh with thorns. An uninitiated boy, Tot, showed me scars on his body which had resulted from this treatment. They also beat girls whom they meet but generally they give them the choice of being beaten or submitting to sexual intercourse (*makwi nguth kie makwi dwar*). A party of boys will meet a single girl or several girls together and compel them to submit to intercourse. I was told also that if they meet a dog they may kill it. They are not answerable for any of these irregularities for they are now in a special state in which they are known as *ciitni* and it is the privilege of *ciitni* to act in these ways. Nevertheless they do not molest initiated men but only boys who do not bear the marks of manhood, and girls.

881 One morning, early, an old woman goes into their hut (*dwil ciitni*) and beats the boys out of it with a bunch of green grass. Occasionally this takes place in the evening. They run out of the hut into the gardens where a crowd of people, consisting mainly of women, pelt them with cattle dung (*buk ke wär*). They run down to a neighbouring stream to wash themselves and on their return to the homestead may beat the cattle with wild rice (*poow*). They then go and rub themselves in their beloved ashes and sprawl in contentment around the dung fires. They spend the rest of the day leaping behind the bullocks given them by their fathers and maternal uncles.

I am not certain that I have recorded these events in their correct order and it is possible that the cleansing ceremony takes place earlier than I believe. There is also later a concluding ceremony at which a big dance takes place (*ke ruath pwot*) and there is general merriment and much duelling. The people who take part in these festivities are members of the age-sets of the fathers of the boys, and their wives, for the boys themselves tour the neighbourhood to ask for presents of giraffe hair and beads and other ornaments from their relatives. At the conclusion of this ceremony a boy's maternal uncle may demand from his father a cow (*yang gäal*, the cow of initiation) on the grounds that his sister's son has now reached manhood. Before the cutting takes place a maternal uncle rubs his sister's son with ashes (*bai*) and makes an address over him (*law*) so that he will pass through the ordeal without difficulty.

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According to Jackson, after the wounds have completely healed the boys go into camp. He says that a group of about a hundred boys is formed and that a bull is provided for each of them. They settle in a spot about an hour's distance from the village and gorge themselves with meat. A young boy or an old woman cooks for them but they may not be visited by girls. During this time they indulge in feats of endurance and when they have eaten all the bullocks they return to their villages.[1] This account by Jackson is not entirely in accord with my own information which does not lead me to consider these camps as part of the institution of age-sets (*pir*) but as only incidentally associated with it. According to my information the newly initiated boys do not always collect in camps after their wounds have healed but only in some years, about every second year, and then it is not only the new initiates who form a camp but also members of their age-set who have been initiated in previous years and even members of senior age-sets. I was told that even a married man would attend and that a man would attend until his son was old enough to replace him. I think that these camps (called *wâk* or *kewar*) are a custom separate from the age-set system, though related to it by the fact that its members are mostly recruited from the unmarried youths of the village and are hence mainly of the same age-set. These camps are also held,moreover, during the closed periods when "the knife is hung up" and no further initiation is allowed to take place. They are held when the first harvest, the *kuol nar*, is ripe. Any youth who possesses a bullock, other than his favourite beast (*dil thakde*), will take it to the *kol*, as these camps are also called, in general with all camps which are without cows and the ordinary activities of pastoral life. A youth will ask his father to give him a bullock so that he may join his comrades [illegible] his request he will arrange for him to share a bullock with a friend and will later pay the owner a male calf for the half which is lent to his son. The young men spend a month, or even two months, in the camp, living mainly on meat, for a bullock is killed every three days or so. Nevertheless they also eat a quantity of porridge, since women in the neighbourhood of the camp, which is generally five to ten miles from the homes of the youths, will make porridge and will bring it to the camp to exchange for meat. The skin of slaughtered bullocks and some parts of the meat are taken back to the village for the older men. Apart from eating meat and indulging in the pursuits incidental to this season of the year, especially

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 146-147.

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883 hunting, the camp does not seem to have any expressed purpose or activity. Certainly I never heard that there was any organised educational training. The young men return to their homesteads in time to eat the *mak*, a mash made by beating out the ear and grinding corn not yet fully ripe and still soft.

•881 561 What I have recorded above is all I know about the ceremonies of cutting the tribal marks and the periods of seclusion and licence associated with the *gar*. So far nothing has been said about the organisation of the *ric*, the age-sets, and I will now turn to this point. According to Jackson "the initiation ceremony should in theory be held about once every 15 years, and this may have been the rule when the tribe was less numerous than it is at the present moment. Nowadays the boys are initiated when there are sufficient of them to make it worth while."[1] It seems to me that this estimate of 15 years is too large since it would mean that many youths would be from 20 to 25 years old at their initiation, which would be contrary to the purpose of the rite. I was told by a good authority in Lou country (Tutrial) that there is always a four years' interval between the closing of one age-set and the commencement of the next one. This information accords with Father Crazzolara's statement that "as a rule the *Gar* takes place once every four years" but he adds that the cattle chief may deviate from this rule for public or even private reasons[2]. He reckons that we may allow about seven years for each *ric* when reckoning a man's age: thus members of the *Pilual* age-set are from 15 to 22 years of age, members of the *Reol* age-set from 22 to 29, members of the *Tankuac* age-set from 29 to 36, and so on. If we can say with fair certainty that there is a four years' interval between each period of initiation we must therefore conclude on this reckoning that each period of initiation lasts about three years. But I am not convinced that we can make so sure a deduction, nor that there is complete regularity in the periods of time during which initiation takes place. Father Crazzolara himself says that the period of initiation may last only a year or up to four years according to the district.[3] On the other hand, at any rate in Lou country, this period may last for several years and youths have been initiated into the *Ikkjac* age-set continuously for at least eight years. Judging from this

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 149.

[2] "Im allgemeinen wird das *Gar* alle vier Jahre vorgenommen. Der Landesvorsteher kann aus hinreichenden Gründen hierin eine Änderung eintreten lassen. So wurde 1908-9 von einem Landesvorsteher bei der Eröffnung der *Gar*-zeit eingesetzt, es seien jetzt bei dem Reichtheilung, ob sein Sohn dasmal gegart werden soll oder ein nächster Stamm darf erwägen, dann das nächste *Gar* erst stattfinden werde, wenn alle (die Sprechenden) auch sehr jungen Söhne auch gegart worden können, womit erst nach 3 oder 4 Jahren." *Op. cit.*, pp. 16-9.

[3] *Op. cit.* p. 19. "Die *Gargattole* kann ein Jahr oder auch bis vier dauern, je nach dem Ermessen dieser Stämme."

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fact and reckoning from the appearance of age which members of the various age-sets present, I think that it would be wiser to allow a ten years' interval between each age-set and at the same time remember that this is likely to be fictitious, since the periods during which boys are being initiated are not regular, though the time interval between the cessation of one period of initiation and the commencement of the next are probably the same. Thus I should reckon that the youngest age-set, the *Lilkgar*, in Lou country commenced about 1923 and that the oldest age-set, members of which are still alive (the *Thaat*), commenced about 1873. This would make these few survivors about 70–75 years of age to-day. Miss Huffman gives a lower estimate which makes these members of the *Thaat* age-set between 60 and 70 years of age, an estimate nearer to that of Father Crazzolara than to mine.[1] However, any calculation must be only roughly approximate since it is not possible to count in the exact manner which the regular cycles of other peoples allow. I am not certain that among the Jekany tribes there are any breaks in initiation, and I am under the impression that initiation goes on every year and that the sets are divided by a declaration of the *wut ok* that all the youths initiated up to a certain time belong to the one set, and all initiated after the time to another set. Thus I was told that in Gaajak country the *Lilkgar* were cut off from the *Rialnac*, but that since the *wut ok* had not come in person to cut them into two sets, in Gaajak country they still remained members of the same set.

The following are the complete lists of age-sets given by various authorities (the oldest age-sets are given first) :—

Jekany (Jackson) (*)	Jekany (Huffman)	Gaajok (Jackson)
Tut	*Yilkith*	*Riagk*
Bor Lotuk	*Lajok*	*Juuk*
Buonbai	*Cuolnaar*	*Shat Bor*
Wang Dak	*Nyagdey*	*Gar Lolek*
Kakik	*Thaat* (60–70)	*Yamaiok*
Wyanni	*Bathor* (55–60)	*Yil Bilk*
Karam	*Mokor* (50–)	*Ngwa Finy*
Shaad Nyaliyat	*Dongnoka* (40–)	*Shaat Shaar*
Pil Nuenh	*Canbar* (27–35)	*Lajak?*
	Lilkgaar (adult) (23–27)	*Tut*
	Lilkgaar (child) (20–23)	*Bor Lolek*
	Cal Tatui (1909)	*Mokor*
	Liarui (1907)	*Dang Gungu*
		Shar Bor
		Lil Golok (1923)

[1] Op. cit. p. 33.

* Jackson says that this list is incomplete and that the Lou have the same age-sets.

* Said to be only one man still living at the time when Jackson wrote.

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in the lists above. Thus one speaks of the *Piluali*, the *Karamni*, the *Ruobni*, the *Lithgacni*, the *Thutni*, the *Rialmacni*, the *Makeri*, the *Nyamnyamni*, etc.

XI.

In seeking to understand the social action of the Nuer age-set system I think that we should first of all abandon the idea that there is any purposive education in initiation. Neither in connection with the cutting nor during any subsequent stage does the initiation of the boys include educational or moral training. It is true that a father may admonish his son at this time to be brave in war, to avoid the wives of other men, to be generous, and never to display greed, but such advice is of the general kind which may be given unsystematically at any time during boyhood. I could find no evidence that there is any kind of teaching of the boys during initiation, either of technique or of traditions. Nor was I told upon repeated enquiry that there was any moral instruction.

I cannot agree with Stigand's description of the Nuer age-sets in this respect and I think that he was largely reading into them the purpose and methods of the Masai system with which he was familiar. He wrote of initiated youths: "When finished they are trained by the old class; the training includes mock battles, fighting with sticks and pelting one another with balls of dried clay—to learn quickness in avoiding spear thrusts. After two years the training is complete, the old class then retire and gradually get married whilst the new class having finished their training go back to live in their villages." He says: "The newly-made warrior may not marry until relieved by the next class."[1] I found nothing which could confirm this account of two-years' training and the prohibition of marriage on the older class during the training of the set which was to replace it, and there is nothing in Jackson's account and little in the recent paper by Father Crazzolara which bears it out.

I think, moreover, that the Nuer age-sets are only incidentally a military system at all, though Stigand and, less dogmatically, Jackson give them this character. It is perfectly true that in warfare the junior age-sets play the chief part, but this is simply due to the fact that they are old enough, and yet not too old, to fight. Boys do not take part in

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 117.

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warfare because they would certainly be killed if they did and the same applies to old men. Nevertheless a good number of the older men who are more active than fellow-members of their age-set will accompany expeditions. Moreover, war is organised by tribal sections based on locality and communal sentiment and not by the age-set system. The whole of a district or a tribe is summoned to take part in a feud or in a raid on the Dinka, and anyone will accompany the expedition who wishes to do so. They do not call up certain age-sets and leave others at home. During the actual fighting, while it is natural that people of roughly the same age will fight side by side, there is nothing compulsive about this arrangement and men of all ages fight together as a section. Thus when two sections unite for warfare we shall find the men of each section fighting with their section and not with their age-set. In the same way a man is not expected to fight only warriors of his own age-set but will engage with whomsoever he finds opposite to him. Hence we may say that the Nuer age-sets are not regiments, and indeed have no specific military functions, but that since age and the ability to bear arms are necessarily related it happens that active warriors are recruited from certain age-sets. On the other hand the social and economic relations of the age-set system are outstanding and it is in them rather than in its ritual that we must look for its significance.

In its economic relations Nuer social life comprises three groups of persons—the women, the men, and the boys. The productive labour of women differs in many respects from that of men but the most prominent distinction between their activities is in milking the cattle. A man may not milk the cows. This is not simply a customary division of labour, as in cooking for example, but is a ritual prohibition or taboo. Were a man to milk a cow all sorts of misfortunes would follow, in particular the death of the cow. The restriction of milking to women has far-reaching effects on their position in Nuer society. But in this respect boys are classed with the women, for they are allowed to milk the cows until they have been initiated into manhood. Consequently initiation means that a boy ceases to milk; he severs his association with women's work; he becomes a man in the sense that he joins the men's group as distinct from the women's group in social life.

If cessation from milking is the most outstanding change in a boy's occupations after initiation it is by no means the only one, for his whole

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THE CHILDREN

857 The little children of the village spend their day in play, eating, and sleeping. The babies are often cared for by the grandmothers. The older children are called on to carry water or to help in some way. The older girl helps her mother in the routine duties of the day.

The little boy in the home plays games. He may have a cane-stalk and string for a fishing-rod and line, and sometimes a bent pin for a hook. When he is about eight years old he begins to herd the sheep each day. He often makes men and cattle out of mud and plays with them.

881 When he is old enough to have the tribal marks cut, his status is at once changed from that of boy to man. His privileges are also increased. He is now interested in securing cattle and sheep of his own.

857 538 524 The children love their folk-lore tales and the many animal stories that are told them by their elders. They believe these implicitly and fear the dreadful ogre that is usually the central figure of the story. They also amuse themselves by guessing riddles, of which they have a large number.

857 But while they are learning many things that are interesting and useful, they are learning many things they do not need to know. They learn to curse. They learn indecency in regard to sexual matters. Indeed, the child mind is full of many things that pollute both thoughts and actions. The lack of privacy in the village and family life account for much of this pollution of mind and action which infests the child. And there is no decidedly corrective method used by the elders of the village. Life was always so, it always will be so, they think.

THE NUER GIRL IN HER HOME LIFE

The life of a girl in the Nuer home is a foretaste of the life of the mother. The bulk of the work which can be done

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Chapter Four

CUTTING THE TRIBAL MARKS

DETAILS OF THE RITE

BY far the most important event in the life of a Nuer boy comes when he has about reached the age of puberty. His people decide that he must have the tribal marks (Fig. 8) cut when the cold winds blow. He knows that now, at least for a short time, he will be the centre of attraction in his village. The younger boys follow after him; he enjoys their admiration and envy.

He has his hair shaved off, not a spear of hair must be left. He removes all his clothing, if he has any, and beads. Ornaments of all kinds, every one of them, must be discarded.

Some men are known to be expert at cutting the tribal marks and they are much in demand as the season of cold winds approaches, for each year there are usually boys in each locality who must have the tribal marks cut and the services of some one who is an adept at the work is required.

Usually this rite is executed upon several boys at the same time and place, so that they may find companionship in the company of each other while they recuperate from this dreadful ordeal. For ordeal it is, no matter how much they try to bolster up their courage.

The boys are allotted a house in which to sleep the night before this rite takes place. Sometimes they secure the kind of pillow which is used by Nuer women, a ring of cane-leaves having a hole in the centre. They practice sleeping on it, for they must use that kind of a pillow until their wounds heal.

The night passes, but little sleeping is done. Before daybreak the people are stirring, for the man who will

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881 cut the tribal marks comes at or before sunrise in order
364 that the ordeal may be over and the boys safely back in the house before the heat of the day begins.

The boys remain in the house, awaiting their call, so that no one with the evil eye may see them.

The girl friends of the boys are also *en route* before sunrise, so that they may see how bravely the boys act when suffering so intensely. The women of the village don their long grass dancing skirts.

A hole from four to six inches in diameter and about six or eight inches deep is dug for each boy. The earth which is taken out of the hole is pulverized and spread around the hole in order that it may absorb the blood. Women and girls attired in their dance skirts rush in, singing and dancing.

One boy is called. He comes out, stark naked, not even wearing a bead. He lies down on his back with his head in the hole. He folds his arms over his chest and then he is ready.

The man, kneeling beside him, begins to cut. He starts at the centre of the forehead and extends the cut to or even *past the ear. The first cut is made just above the eyes,* then the remaining cuts are made parallel to it until they are six in number. Then the man goes over to the left side and, kneeling there, repeats the same process. Then he returns to the right side and makes sure that all of the cuts are deep and continuous at the centre of the forehead, and that they are six in number.

The boy usually lies absolutely still, for a show of fear on his part would bring ridicule from the girls and women that would be hard to bear, and if he moves it will mean that the cut will not be straight and he will always have to wear a scar that will proclaim to any Nuer that he flinched while the tribal marks were being cut.

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As one is finished another boy is called until all lie there, still and bleeding. Usually everything is very quiet when the actual cutting is going on, the only sound heard being the grating of the knife upon the bone. 881 304

The boy lies there until the bleeding has stopped, then he is helped into the house. He crawls into the house on his hands and feet, but with his back next to the ground and tries to hold his head and body in a horizontal position. The man who cuts these tribal marks is supposed to stay for a while if he can, in case there should be haemorrhage.

If there should be haemorrhage, pressure and the application of cow-manure ash is tried to relieve it. Also fear is expressed that some one with the evil eye must have seen the boy or else there would have been no haemorrhage. [752] [754]

Soon after the tribal marks are cut a sheep is sacrificed in order to insure safe healing of the cuts. A little later a mock fight is staged between the men and the women of the village in which the women are allowed to use clubs, but the men must defend themselves bare-handed.

The boy is carefully guarded against the evil eye. He wears a piece of sheepskin over his head, this piece of sheepskin usually being one part, the back section, of a married woman's garb which has been given for this purpose. No one is supposed to view the cuts until they are healed, but the boy usually gives some trusted friend an opportunity to see them.

After some days the cuts are washed, but not immediately, for the clotted blood is left undisturbed for some time.

The boy usually carries a large cluster of feathers as a fan in order to keep the flies away from his head.

He is the centre of attraction at his village now. All visitors to the village are met at a little distance and their

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• 881 names announced before they may come near, for the evil
304 eye must constantly be guarded against.

An animal skin is always spread on the ground for him to sit on. Food is specially prepared for him in order that he may speedily regain his strength and vigour again. He is treated as a most honoured guest in the village, and is the centre of concern.

Later on the boy is supposed to give some gift to the man who cut the tribal marks for him. Sometimes this man happens to be a very dear friend of the boy and may honour him by cutting seven cuts instead of the customary six.

The boy takes cane-stalks and peels them, cutting them into four-inch lengths. He makes a girdle or belt of them by fastening them together side by side. He may go visiting at night after his wounds are well on the way to recovery, and he always wears this belt. He also carries a long stick which has a piece of ambatch or other light wood at the end of it, and also a cluster of white feathers.

He is not allowed to go among the cattle until he is entirely well. When one asks him if his wounds are healed he will always say 'not yet', but one may find out if they are really healed by asking him if he has gone among the cattle. If not, the wounds are still sore, but if he has been with the cattle it means that the wounds are well healed, although the boy will not say so for fear some one with the evil eye should hear of it.

[143] No pregnant woman must come near the boy until his wounds are healed; a man whose wife is pregnant must also be avoided.

301 Nuers do not wear bead necklaces after the tribal marks are cut, although strands of beads may be worn around the waist or over each shoulder and under the opposite arm. Wooden beads may be worn for a few months, then they may wear the giraffe hair necklaces.

● 98/ This rite changes the status of the boy from that of boy to man. Now he may attend all dances, he may carry a spear—in fact, all the privileges of a man are his. He also may exercise authority over boys who have not as yet had the tribal marks cut, and his sisters must treat him more respectfully than in the past, for now he has a voice in the affairs that concern them. However, he must render due deference to those who have had their tribal marks cut before him.

NUER CLASS NAMES

98/ 55/ 56/ All the boys who have had their tribal marks cut during a certain period (usually consisting of from three to eight or ten years) are given a certain class name. While no Nuer knows his age exactly, he will always tell you to which class he belongs. Those who know the sequence of classes may judge his age approximately.

Classes of Nuer with approximate age now (1929).

Liereni	Tribal marks cut in 1927 (but only one authority for this name. All others call this class of 1927 Cai Yatni or Wum Kelunka).
Cai Yatni	Marks cut in 1925.
Lithgaac intot	Age now 20–25 years.
Lithgaac indit	25–27 years.
Cárboc	27–35 years.
Dongonka	40– years.
Meker	50– years.
Bailoc	55–60 years.
Thut	60–70 years, but few living.
Nompiny	Probably none living now.
Custcuor	
Lajok	
Yilbith	

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AGE-SET ORGANISATION

INITIATION

Formerly boys were initiated at the age of 16 to 18, each village making its arrangements independently. The ceremony usually takes place after the rains. The officer in charge of initiation into age sets is the wut *ghok* (the man of the cattle). He opens the period when initiation may take place, 'when the knife is brought out' *(ngoa kam rar)* and closes it 'when the knife is hung up' *(be ngoa ngak)*. At the beginning of an initiation period the cattle expert kills a bullock, a big dance is held and he makes a speech opening a new period of initiation. In each tribe there is a cattle expert whose authority is acknowledged in matters concerning age-set organisation.

At the initiation ceremony 6 deep cuts are made across the forehead of the boy, extending from ear to ear. After the cutting *(gar)* the boys, who suffer great pain, are shut up in a hut for two days. There is a period of confinement (lasting one to two weeks) which is followed by one of mild licence. During the whole of this time the initiates must strictly avoid any contact with cattle. Finally, cleansing ceremonies are carried out and a concluding ceremony and dance. After this the youths are recognised as adults and enter into normal adult life and affairs, and into lifelong contact with the herds.

AGE SETS

All boys initiated during a number of successive years belong to a single age set *(ric)*. Until recently there was a four years' interval between the end of one set and the beginning of the next, and this was the period when the man of the cattle hung up his knife and no more initiations were held.

The age sets are organised independently in each tribe, but it often happens that, when a new set has been started in one tribe, an adjacent tribe will follow suit.(1) A set usually lasts for ten years before being cut and there are generally members of six sets alive at any one time. The names of the sets are not uniform for the whole of Nuerland, and they are not repeated. Each age set has two or three subdivisions, each with a separate name. Subdivisions are made up of those initiated together in one year or possibly the combined initiates of two years. All the members of a set are known by the name of the first division. At initiation the individual enters the set in which he will remain for the rest of his life. The members of a set have a common name, equal status, and observe certain patterns of behaviour towards one another and towards members of senior and junior sets (see below p.148).

The sets are not specifically graded as boys, warriors, and elders, as in some forms of age-set organisation, nor have they any political, juridical or military functions. Their importance is of a social nature in that a person's position in the age-set structure determines his social behaviour. Milking and other women's work is forbidden to a youth after

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, 1940, p.250.

561 initiation. He is a *wut*, a man, whereas before he was one of the *dhuli* (boys). He is now treated by his elders as a man and he has close con-
●881 tacts with the cattle; he herds them, has his own ox and takes an ox name. He goes to dances and indulges in love-making and flirting as the preliminaries to marriage.

561 Certain ritual observances are practised between members of the same
764 age set, and between members of different sets: sets are segregated at
582 sacrificial feasts; members of a set cannot bury an age mate or participate in the mortuary ceremonies; a man may not marry or have sexual relations with the daughter of an age mate, for he is as a father to her; a man should not marry a daughter of one of his father's age mates unless his or her father is dead, because the strained relations between the two fathers-in-law would be incompatible with the free and easy relations of equality which should exist between age mates.

561 Members of a junior set are expected to show respect to members of senior sets. Since every Nuer has an age relationship to every other Nuer, the attitudes and types of behaviour between two men are determined in advance of meeting, unless there is any particularly strong and overruling tie of kinship.

561 Relations between sets are defined in ordinary kinship terms. Mem-
608 bers of a father's age set are fathers, their wives are mothers; members of one's own age set are brothers, their wives are sisters, and so forth. When speaking of a set immediately senior to his own, but not his father's, a man will call the men fathers-in-law and the women mothers-in-law, because he is usually courting the daughters of this age set in preparation for marriage.

MARRIAGE

582 Marriage is not permitted between *clansfolk, close cognates, close* kinsfolk by adoption, close affines or persons who stand to one another as father and daughter in the age-set system. If it is uncertain whether the genealogical distance between a couple is wide enough to permit marriage, a sacrifice (generally a beast) will be offered to cut the bonds of kinship if any exist.(1)

There are several types of marriage among the Nuer.

588 1. *Ghost Marriage.* If a man dies before he has married or if his wife does not bear him male children, one of his close kinsmen has the obligation of marrying a wife to his name, for it is held that no initiated male should be allowed to lie in his grave unremembered in his children. A vicarious marriage is contracted, and the vicarious husband acts as though he were the true husband in the marriage ritual. Evans-Pritchard states that "in physiological and in domestic roles he is husband, in all but the legal sense..... The legal husband is the ghost in whose name the bride cattle are paid and the marriage ritual performed."(2) The ghost family is a legal family and such families are almost as numerous as simple

(1) Evans-Pritchard, "Nuer rules of exogamy and incest", 1948, p.90.
(2) Evans-Pritchard, "Some aspects of marriage and the family among the Nuer", 1930, pp.369-9.

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826 handed man that his left hand is his right hand.
811 It is the quality of leftness, not the thing that is left, the hand itself, which is significant for them. Similarly, the left half of the severed carcass of a sacrificial animal is not intrinsically evil. It is always eaten by someone. It is bad symbolically, not in itself, and symbolically only in certain contexts or for certain people.

411 It is suggested that the spear as a projection of
885 the right hand symbolizes the vitality of man,
562 the manhood of man with the associations of lineage values that go with it. It is within the logic of the representation that we speak only of men. The spear stands for masculinity. Women do not bear fighting-spears. The spear does not go with femininity. Hence also boys do not bear
• [881] fighting-spears till at their initiation to manhood they are given them by their fathers. Before this event they are something in between men and women, and this is shown by the fact that they milk the cows, a feminine task that men may not undertake. That neither women nor boys bear spears means that they do not go to war and also that they do not sacrifice. It is not just that a woman may not slaughter the sacrificial victim —it is not, in any case, important who slaughters it—but that, not being able to bear the spear, she cannot make the sacrificial invocation, which is made by the spear in the right hand as well as by the mouth. She can indeed address Spirit at sacrifices, but if she does so she prays (*pal*); she does not invocate (*law*). This is understandable when we think of the spear as an extension of the right hand and hence as representing strength, masculinity, and goodness. Sacrifice, like war, belongs to that side of life, what we ourselves call the spear-side.[1]

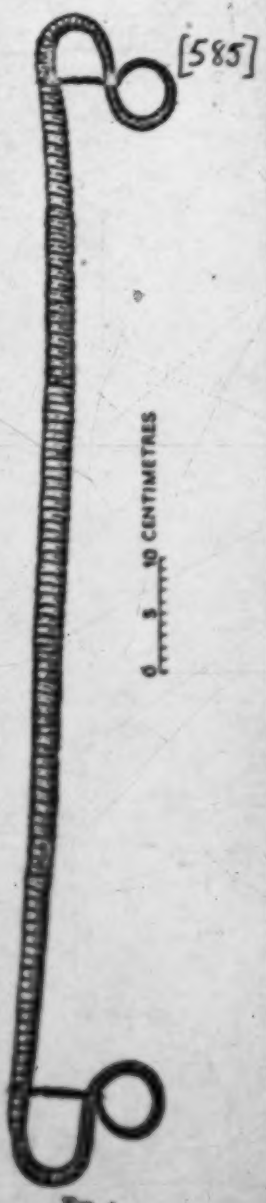

FIG. 4
Instrument used in wedding invocations

[1] I was told that a wife may act as master of ceremonies in her husband's place and shout out the spear-name of his clan at a wedding. This is the most ghok mentioned later.

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411 even if the spear a man's father gives him at his initiation has been bought from an Arab merchant, and is not in fact the spear the father received from his father and the father's father from his father, it is ideally so regarded and thus serves as a symbol of filiation. The spear is thus a point at which two complex social representations meet, that of the person and that of the lineage. Consequently I do not think that the high assessment of spears in cattle can be assigned to scarcity alone or even that scarcity was at any time the primary consideration. Spears, both fighting- and fishing-spears, were something more, and fighting-spears something much more, than weapons of war or of the chase. They were almost parts of the person. I have seen Nuer enraged when neighbours have borrowed their spears without permission, especially if they have lost them, their anger being out of all proportion to the offence if we think of the matter solely in terms of economic value, for the economic value of spears is negligible at the present day. It is the audacity and the insult which outrage the owner, as though someone had taken, and perhaps lost, part of his person; and all the more so in the case of the fighting-spear, with which are bound up his manhood and his participation in his lineage, as we see from the manner of his receiving it at his initiation.

411 881 I have discussed elsewhere[1] the ritual of initiation and I do so again in connexion with the role of cattle in Nuer religion. All that need be said here is that when a boy is initiated into manhood and takes on the full responsibilities of that status he is presented by his father with a *mut*, a metal fighting-spear, and an ox —the two objects in which, as I have said, the whole drama of sacrifice is centred. I discuss here only the spear. A boy may before initiation possess a fishing-spear, but even today he is most unlikely to own a fighting-spear. Even should he do so, he would still be presented with a spear by his father at his initiation, for it is a ceremonial gift expressing formal recognition of his manhood and all that that means in the social life of the Nuer, and also the handing over by one generation to another. It is not just a spear, but a new status also that he is being given. The boy is now boy no longer but man and warrior and soon to be husband and father. He takes part in feuds and wars and raids. He also for the first time engages in dances and displays with oxen, both of which among the Nuer are martial exercises as well as play intimately

[1] 'The Nuer: Age-Sets', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1936.

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associated with courtship; and also in the pursuits of herding and hunting. All these activities require the use of the spear, but it is important that we recognize that it is not the acquisition of a weapon, whatever its economic value might have been in the past, nor even its utility, great though that may be, that gives a crucial significance to the gift of a spear at initiation. Its significance is moral, not merely utilitarian. It is not the spear itself, nor its possession, which is stressed but the activities associated with it: war and raiding, dancing and display, and herding. The uses of the spear itself and the evaluations of its uses as an index of social personality are blended, so that the spear is not just a weapon but also something which stands for a very complex set of social relations.

But the investment of a youth with a spear at his initiation would seem to be something more, for, as we will see in discussing the sacrificial role of cattle, initiation is not only into the social life of adults but also into a new relationship with the cattle which has an important religious side to it. There is now established an identification, deriving from the sacrificial situation, between the initiates and cattle and, looked at from this point of view, the rites of initiation may be said to have a sacramental character. The boy enters into communion with the spirits and ghosts of his lineage through the cattle. 'The spear of the cutting (initiation)' is thus a symbol of a sacramental change as well as of a change in social status. In both symbolic aspects it is an extension of, and stands for, the right arm and represents strength, strength of the soul as well as strength of the body of the person; and, as I shall attempt to show, in both the symbolism is also a representation of the collective strength of the lineage to which the person belongs.

I have suggested that the fighting-spear has a symbolic meaning for Nuer besides what it means for them as a weapon and tool—that it is a projection of the self and stands for the self. This is most important for an understanding of Nuer sacrifice. Its manipulation in the most common, and for a study of religion the most significant, sacrifices, the personal and piacular ones, expresses, if our interpretation is right, the throwing of the whole person into the intention of the sacrifice. It is not only said but also thought, desired, and felt. Not only the lips make it but also the mind, the will, and the heart. This interpretation makes the miming with the spear intelligible for, as an extension of the right arm, it stands

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231 583 custom of taking personal names from their cattle in addition to the personal names they are given soon after birth. I have discussed elsewhere[1] the general social significance of names and other modes of address among the Nuer and here I speak only of their cattle-names and principally of their ox-names, these being of chief importance.

These names are often spoken of in writings about the Nuer as bull-names, but ox-names, in the use of the word 'ox' to denote a castrated bull, is a more correct designation.[2] Nuer speak always of such a name as *cot thak*, the name of an ox, and *thak* is a castrated animal in contrast to a *tut*, an entire animal. It is true that when a youth takes his name from a beast it may be entire, but it will be castrated later. Nuer may not castrate a male calf till it is nearly two years old, but they do so before it is likely to gender with the cows. It is not for pedantry that I make the distinction: it has a logical, and perhaps psychological, appositeness to the equation of man and ox in sacrifice.

Ox-names are essentially the names of men, males who have passed through the rite of initiation to manhood. Boys may take ox-names in play but only in imitation of their elders. Likewise, maidens may take ox-names, from bull calves of the cows they milk, but they are mainly used only between girls themselves and in the nature of a game, copying their brothers; and the names are short-lived. Married women use cow-names among themselves, but, here again, this is similitude, and it has none of the significance of the ox-names of men. Perhaps also here again the distinction between the copy-names of boys, girls, and women and those taken by men may be important because of its logical relation, which concerns our present discussion, to the fact that men, and not boys or women, are the sacrificial agents. The two sides of the standard equation are the human male and the bovine male, man and ox.

231 ● [YYI] 583 When a boy is initiated his father gives him in sign of his manhood an ox or, as I have explained, a bull calf which will later be castrated; and this ox, which he describes as '*thak gerrda*', 'the ox of my cutting (initiation)', becomes his *dil thak*, what I have spoken about as his favourite ox (Marno's '*Lieblingsstier*'), though

[1] 'Nuer Modes of Address', *Uganda Journal*, 1948.

[2] Throughout the literature on the Nuer, 'ox' or 'steer' or 'bullock' should in most cases be substituted for 'bull'.

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A youth takes his cry and his personal name from the markings and other traits of the ox his father gives him at initiation. By the rites of initiation boys are made men,[1] and this means, among other things, a conspicuous change in their relation to the cattle. They now cease to look after the calves and sheep and goats and to perform the more menial services of kraal and byre. Instead they tend the adult cattle. The most marked change is that whereas before initiation they helped the women milk the cows they now altogether cease to milk. But these external and evident changes are accompanied by a deeper, and hidden, transformation, men and oxen being brought into an intimacy of relationship on a different plane to that of mere proximity and association, however close, so that in some way an equation is brought about between man and ox. Such would seem to be the interpretation of certain very peculiar, though outstanding, features of the initiation rites. I have described these rites and discussed their social significance elsewhere,[2] and in this place I shall only draw attention to those features which have special relevance to our immediate subject.

The rites direct our attention throughout to the relationship between men and cattle. It is the *wut ghok*, the man of the cattle, to which he stands in a special ritual relationship, who opens and closes the periods of initiation. During initiation the initiates may not have any contact with the cattle, which are a danger to them till their wounds are completely healed and they formally pass out of seclusion. The prohibition extends even to rubbing ashes of cattle-dung over their bodies, a daily practice common to all men and boys; and Dr. Mary Smith tells me that Nuer say that it may harm the lads if the smoke of the smudges reaches them: though the fact that they drink milk suggests that the interdiction really concerns their relation to the oxen rather than to cattle in general, just as the interdiction on women drinking milk during their periods concerns their relation to cows and not to cattle in general. In the terminal rite of initiation, when the initiates are

[1] Or, perhaps, one should rather say 'Nuer men', for Nuer do not regard other people as 'men', whatever their age. They think of *wut*, manhood, as something specifically Nuer. Consequently Dinka who have already been initiated in their own country have their foreheads cut in the Nuer fashion across the scars of their Dinka initiation if they become members of Nuer communities.

[2] 'The Nuer: Age-Sets', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1936. Since this article was written I have obtained further information which has not been published.

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231 'loosened' (*lony rar*, the verb *lony* being that used for loosening
• 88/ cattle from their tethering-pegs) they re-establish their contact with the cattle. They are pelted (smeared) by their seniors with cattle-dung (*buk ke war*). Then they wash in a stream. On their return to the homestead they beat the cattle with wild rice, and afterwards rub themselves with ashes of cattle-dung. They spend the rest of the day leaping and chanting behind the oxen given them by their fathers and possibly, if they are lucky, by their paternal and maternal uncles also, which are the first oxen they can call their own. The fact that after initiation there is an interdiction on men milking also seems to point to an opposition between women and cows on the one side and men and oxen on the other side and further to emphasize the equation of man and ox.

One might perhaps feel that one was attributing to the facts a symbolical significance which the evidence does not sustain were it not that further, and very striking, observations push one to the interpretation put forward. Thus, the name of the dances held at the initiation ceremonies is *ruath*, the word for a bull calf from the time it is weaned, that is to say a bull, normally destined to be an ox, which has broken with its dam in the same way as a youth at initiation cuts, as we would put it, the apron strings which before have tied him to his mother, especially in the matter of food, as some of the symbolism of the rites indicates. Further, between the cutting of the marks of manhood on a boy's forehead and his ceremonial emergence from seclusion (or exclusion from the normal life) he is known as *cot*, which appears to be the same word as that used for a hornless cow or ox. It is remarkable also that Nuer compare to the initiation of youths the cutting (*ngat*) of the horns of favourite oxen (they are entire animals at the time) so that they will grow against the cut at fancy angles, generally in a curve across the muzzle (*ma gut*). They say that the operation, which is performed before castration, is the *gar*, the cutting of the marks of manhood, on the young bulls. If the operation has not already been carried out before a father presents a young bull to his son at initiation it is likely to be one of the young man's first acts in the period immediately following his own initiation. I have noted earlier how soon after their initiation youths, if they can procure the metal, fasten bracelets up their left arms so tightly as to render them, for the time of

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their wearing, incapable of use, and that they also render useless the left horns of their favourite oxen by deforming them.[1]

Human thought and expression are inevitably constructed out of man's experience of the world around him. There is nothing that should surprise us in Nuer speaking metaphorically of boys by the same word (*ruath*) as they use for young bulls and for the male young of other animals, and, by contrast, of men by the same word (*tut*) as they use for adult bulls and adult males of other animal species. It is natural—it would be remarkable were it not so—that Nuer use cattle metaphors in speech and gesture. Nevertheless, the evidence, some of which I have presented, suggests that there is more in it than that. Whether Professor Seligman's psychological use of the word 'identification' is correct is a question that lies outside my own competence and the scope of this book, but it cannot be denied that there is a moral identification, a participation imposed on the individual by his culture and inextricably bound up with religious values. When henceforward I speak of identification it is to be understood in this sense.

[1] [See p. 235, cat. 116, — Analyst]

II

We have noted that there is a personal side and a collective side to Nuer religion and that we may speak of personal and collective types of sacrifice. We have noted also that in the collective type the officiant represents the whole clan, that the spear he holds in his hands is that of the ancestor of the clan, and that he invokes God as the God who created his ancestor and the God of his fathers. We have further noted that the sacrificial victim, although in fact it is an ox or a surrogate for an ox, is not spoken of as *thak*, ox, but as *yang*, cow, a general term referring to any bovine beast, with a plural form *ghok*, meaning 'cattle'. This suggests that the victim embodies the general idea of the equivalence of cattle and men in the sacrificial act, and there is certainly what we may speak of as a collective identification of clans and lineages with their herds. This is expressed in the honorific titles of clans and lineages. We have been discussing hitherto the equation of man with ox. These titles introduce us to the idea of an enduring relationship between a social group and its ancestral herd.

On the day when, by the cutting of lines on his forehead, a boy

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On the day when, by the cutting of lines on his forehead, a boy

• 881 becomes a man there is much rejoicing of his kinsfolk, and especially of his father and paternal kin. In talking to Nuer about this day they have impressed on me that what is uppermost in the minds of the older men, particularly at the initiation of an eldest son, is that the continuity of the family and lineage is now assured. Initiation is the threshold to marriage and the birth of sons who will remember their forebears; for as soon as the period of healing and seclusion is over the initiates embark on a full sex life leading to courtship, marriage, and begetting. An initiate is part of a lineage and clan and his initiation is seen in terms of its collective life. His new relationship with the cattle is then not only a personal one, important though that is, but the personal relationship is incorporated in a more general lineage one.

231 613 614 Nuer conceive of the ancestor of a clan, and likewise the ancestors of its component lineages, as having possessed a herd, the descendants of which have had, and continue to have, though distributed among different families, a constant relationship with the descendants of their original owners and are still thought of as one herd. This ancestral herd is a fiction, for the cattle are being constantly dispersed and replaced by others at marriages, but conceptually it is an enduring collectivity. There is ideally a constant attachment, the clan and its herd forming a joint community down the generations, so much so that a common, perhaps the commonest, explanation of a division in the clan is the fighting of bulls of the ancestors of the divided parts. The social cleavage is represented in tradition as a cleavage in the herd.

231 613 614 553 196 The unity of clans and lineages is symbolized in the names of the ancestral spears, which we have already discussed[1] and in honorific titles, chiefly derived from the names of cows. In both cases we are dealing with ideas and not actual things, with the idea of a clan spear handed down as an heirloom and with the idea of the present herds of the members of a clan being descended from the ancestral herd. Nuer say that '*mut kene paak jalke kel*', 'the spear and the honorific title go together'. If a man has a certain clan spear he must have one or more honorific titles which go with it. Both have come down together from *tuok nath*, the beginnings of the Nuer. The *paak*, a word found with the same meaning in some of the other Nilotic languages, may be described as an honorific title used as a mode of salutation or address. It is commonly used on ceremonial occasions, as on formal visits, at dances,

[1] [See pp. 240-47, esp. 118 (298)] —Analyst]

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THE SACRIFICIAL ROLE OF CATTLE

The very special circumstances in which cattle are killed for food are times of severe famine and in what are called *nak*, or in some parts of Nuerland *kuar* or *cuel*, camps. Within my own short experience, in 1931, a year of great hunger, the Lou Nuer killed many oxen for food, and during a famine in western Nuerland in 1935 a great number of beasts were slaughtered to keep the people alive. Dr. Howell says that in the Zeraf valley in 1943, likewise a year of famine, animals were being killed for food.[1] The Lou Nuer even have a reputation, of which they are ashamed, for killing oxen when hungry, for not waiting, that is, till faced with starvation. How often this situation used to occur is not, and cannot, be known. If it is not altogether a modern phenomenon, we may suppose that it was much less likely to have arisen before rinderpest depleted the herds and imposed peace prevented their rehabilitation through raiding, the milk supply thus being lessened.[2] *Nak* camps are presumably so called because they are formed for the express purpose of killing (*nak*) oxen. They are formed in some years only, in the rains or at the commencement of the dry season, by youths, each of whom takes an ox to the camp where one by one they are slaughtered and the young men gorge themselves on their flesh. Now that cattle have become scarcer two youths may share a single animal, though it is still thought that there ought to be an ox to a man. There is some doubt about the precise significance of this custom. When I published an account of the Nuer age-set system[3] I considered that it did not form an integral part of the rites of initiation but was only incidentally connected with them. I may have been wrong in this conclusion, and my own later researches revealed features which incline me to accept Dr. Howell's contention that they are connected with the age-set system.[4] Certainly there is more in the *nak* than merely killing oxen for feasting. That it has a ritual significance is clear from the fact that the youths who take part in it are segregated. Girls are not allowed to enter, or at any rate to sleep in, the camps. Abstinence is imposed at a time when the company of girls and their favours are a Nuer's chief interest. Nor may the

[1] P. P. Howell, 'The Age-set System and the Institution of "Nak" among the Nuer' (with a Note by E. E. Evans-Pritchard), *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1948, p. 180. I was told that on raids on the Dinka pillaged oxen were slaughtered for food. [2] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, 1940, pp. 19–20.
[3] 'The Nuer: Age-Sets', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1936.
[4] P. P. Howell, *ibid.*

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young men attend dances, which therefore do not take place at this time. Also, they may have no contact of any kind with the herds other than with the oxen with which they are segregated. It is to be noted further that the borrowing from kin and neighbours of oxen for slaughter by youths whose families are unable to provide them with suitable animals is no ordinary loan but is of a peculiar and ritual character. The owner of a beast who is asked for it by a youth may not refuse the request, and not only for social reasons but also, says Dr. Howell, because 'he would run the risk of spiritual contamination resulting in sickness or even death among the members of his family'.[1] Nor may he demand repayment for some years. These facts considered in the light of the great reluctance, to say the least of it, of Nuer to kill an ox other than for sacrifice suggest strongly that a slaughter on this scale has some religious significance. I asked Dr. Lienhardt and Dr. Smith to inquire about this matter. The former informs me that an old man makes an invocation over one of the oxen, which stands for all of them, and the latter that the older men who have contributed the beasts make invocations over them, though they do not consecrate them with ashes. It would seem, therefore, that if their slaughter is not a proper sacrifice it has to some extent a sacrificial character. It is significant also that not only is the killing obligatory but also that each youth ought to provide an ox for slaughter, an ox for a man, for we seem to have here again the equivalence of a man with an ox, which is the basis of piacular sacrifice: and it can easily be seen that the death of an ox at the termination of the rites of initiation would be a sacramental act appropriate to the whole setting of initiation.

Except on those rare occasions when dire necessity or custom compels them to do so, Nuer do not kill cattle except in sacrifice: and it is regarded as a fault to kill them *'bang lieu'*, 'just for nothing', the Nuer way of saying that they ought not to be killed for meat. This is clearly shown, apart from the facts I have already instanced, by the statement that an ox slain simply from desire for meat may *ciem*, take ghostly vengeance on, its slayer, for it has *cuong*, right, in the matter. Maybe Nuer do not take this very seriously, but that they say it at all is an indication of how they regard the matter, for, as we have seen, they fear ghostly vengeance and hold that it operates only because God is permissive,

[1] Ibid., p. 176.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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case of the leopard-skin priestly lineages, any member of a lineage of men of the cattle can perform the services attached to that office, but in practice only some, and senior, persons would normally be called upon to do so. These services have less religious and social importance than those of the *kuaar muon*, and a man of the cattle is not by virtue of his office a person of social importance. One hears of him chiefly in connexion with his ability to perform rites to cure sick beasts and to make barren cows fertile, usually by spitting on grass and beating the animal's back with it while asking God to make the beasts well or fertile. In times of murrain he may sacrifice an ox to God. I was told that after consecrating it he would speak in this vein: 'What, God? Take this ox, it is thine. Thou art master of the world, the world is thine and it is thine affair alone. What, God? Do not kill all the cattle. What will our children eat? No one will live. Oh God, take thy cow and spare a portion of the herds. God, I am a man of the cattle and I have come to sacrifice this beast; take it, it is thine.' Nuer say that he addresses '*kwoothdi*', 'his spirit', that is Spirit as figured in relation to his office, the God of his fathers. He may also on raids lash a tethering-cord in the direction of enemy herds to ensure booty. He may be consulted about the time of moving to dry-season camps. He is said to sprinkle people with milk in time of sickness, and at his own mortuary ceremony his kinsmen and possessions are aspersed with milk. He is buried in fresh cattle manure. He cannot accept cattle in compensation for adultery with his wife. His curse can cause cattle to die and a man to have diarrhoea if he drinks milk. All these customs and notions give him that mystical association with cattle which is indicated by his title and also by his badge of office, a circle or two of tethering-cord round his neck.

As I have explained earlier (pp. 255-6), initiation of boys to manhood is intimately bound up with their relation to the cattle. It is therefore appropriate that it should be a man of the cattle who in each tribe determines when a new age-set should commence and when it should close, performs sacrifices to open and close the periods of initiation, and names the sets; and this is the most important public function of any man of the cattle. We see here again how, as in the cases of the masters of ceremonies and the leopard-skin priests, the chief religious function of men of the cattle, their formal sacrificial and ceremonial role, is concerned with group activities. In their case the activities are relations